

# Telling the Truth – The *Pied Piper Song* Lyricist Finally Stands Up

Cheryl Lewis

Seventy-six years have elapsed since the *Pied Piper Song* became a reality conceived through a 1938 school song contest issued by the local parent-teacher organization. The song sheet itself gives credit to Donald Cherry as the lyricist, with music composition by Maxine Brundage and Geneva Jo Maberry. At some point along the way, Hamlin students were led to believe that the Donald Cherry who contributed the words to our school song hailed from Wichita Falls, Texas and would later become the well-known “singing golfer,” whose “velvet voice” recording of “Thinking of You,” shot to the number 3 slot on Hit Parade. Donald Ross Cherry would later become the “jingle man” for Proctor and Gamble’s 1956 “Mr. Clean” product, and would compete in the Master’s golf tournament nine times, the U.S. Open eight times, along with participating in many other national and world golf stages. In 1962, Cherry decided to turn professional as an entertainer and would find himself paired with his good friend, Dean Martin on the various Nevada stages and television venues.

In doing research for “The History of Hamlin’s Schools” DVD production several years ago for the Historical Rath Trail Association, I began to wonder why a 14 year-old young man from Wichita Falls would have any connection with submitting words to Hamlin, Texas for a school song. The drama for seeking the “real” Donald Cherry became much like a throw-back to the popular 1956 television game show, “To Tell The Truth,” that has spanned six decades. For those who may not be familiar with the game show, three contestants pose as one particular individual, and are quizzed by four Hollywood celebrities to see if they can determine the true person the contestants are portraying. Once all of the questions have been asked, the celebrities select who they think it is; then, the TRUE contestant is asked to stand. Deciding to go directly to the source of the proposed Wichita Falls Donald Cherry, I picked up the phone and called his number and spoke with his wife while he listened in on the conversation. He relayed to her that it certainly was not him since he never recalled even being in Hamlin and would have no reason to participate in a Hamlin school event. The mystery would continue as to whom the real Donald Cherry was, and where had he gone?

From the letter that Geneva Jo Maberry wrote to the Hamlin Ex-Students Association on January 21, 1993, she recalled the following:

“Miss Whitely was my English teacher. I can see her standing to the left of her desk-announcing a contest for writing the words and music for our school song. Trying to motivate us for this contest she went on to say that some may desire the contest winner for the lyrics before writing our music. Finally they gave us the selected words written by Donald Cherry. I liked his pretty name, Donald Cherry. Working many hours day and night, erasing and adding notes, enjoying every minute,-finally, the results were split between Maxine Brundage and my contribution for the Pied Piper School Song music. Seeing the final handout to my amazement, each note to Donald’s words was my contribution to the Pied Piper School song. Maxine did the drum introduction. I liked her contribution very much. The thumping to the drum section was very impressive upon entering the football field.”

Feeling that Geneva actually knew Donald Cherry by her written and underlined remarks, I began perusing the Ex-Students directory for the classes around that time period and was successful in locating the listing of a couple of students with the last name of Cherry, but alas, no Donald Cherry. I then opted to read through the 1937 and 1938 *Hamlin Herald* microfilm years to see if any mention was made on the school song or any reference to the Cherry family. It was during this reading that a Mr. W. T. Cherry was mentioned for some recognition with the Hamlin Santa Fe Railroad, and that he and his family would be moving to Slaton, TX. My gut feeling told me that this man was indeed the father to our song lyricist, but still no definite proof. Conversing on the dilemma with my cousin, Tony Lewis, he promised to help me research for Donald with the information I shared with him. It wasn't long until he forwarded me a letter or blog dated December 21, 2011 to a Houston area newspaper regarding the writer's memories of the 1938 Cotton Bowl. The letter written by a Donald Cherry read:

"Dear Grandson, Here's a picture of me to show that you are not the only person in the family who has been bitten by the Rice BUG! The occasion for my acquiring the Rice flag was the Cotton Bowl game New Years' Day 1938, just before my 14th birthday, about your current age. It was when Rice beat Colorado 28-14. The grown up men planned to go to the Cotton Bowl game and decided to include me. Mother bought me an overcoat and maybe the suit I'm wearing in the photo, which was taken later in the year in front of our West Texas home in Hamlin, Texas."

BINGO! Our mystery man was now confirmed to be a Donald Cherry living somewhere perhaps in the Houston area. Doing some "googling" in reference to age, I came up with a Donald Cherry living in the Houston area, and decided to give him a call. A very kind lady answered the phone and I asked her if this was the residence of a Mr. Donald Cherry who once lived in Hamlin, Texas and whose father worked for the railroad, being transferred later to Slaton. She confirmed "yes," it was, and then I asked "may I speak to Mr. Cherry?" When he joined in on the conversation, my first question to him was, "Did you provide the words to our Hamlin school song?" He easily laughed and told me "Yes," and he had a story to go with it; a story that many may be surprised with.

He commenced telling me about the school contest and how his mother strongly encouraged him to submit words for the song. Not really being that enthusiastic with the project as a 14 year-old youth, he related thumbing through his mom's Kansas school annual and coming across the words to her school song. The words for Hamlin's school song were to be submitted prior to writing the actual musical score, making it somewhat easier to submit the verses by simply changing some words and adding in others to match one's locale and mascot. So, that's what our Donald did; he made an "adaptation - alteration" from Wichita, Kansas to Hamlin, Texas.

The announcement for the contest winner came during a school assembly in the auditorium. Donald was already on stage as a member of the Piper band, and when they announced him as being the winner of the contest, he was asked to step up and recite by memory the words he had submitted; his heart sank. He recalled "I remembered the first line, which I belted out loudly," yet, not having really been committed to composing the words from his heart, he remarked at having to be "prompted" off and on throughout the remainder of the song. He related at how difficult he felt it was for the two ladies to have to come up with the musical score based on the lyrics of the song.

Following his high school graduation from Slaton, in what I believe to have been 1941, he attended Texas A & M University and played the saxophone in the famous A & M band. With World War 2 ensuing, he served time with the U.S. Army, and would later come back to A & M and receive his B.S. and Master's degree in Civil Engineering. He had a long-tenured career with Humble Oil, and worked in

the production department in employee relations, serving the last two years of his career in Singapore. Cherry continued his musical talents by playing his saxophone for parties, and some years ago, finally hung up the old woodwind after listening to a recording that someone had made when he played for a gathering and his G# key got stuck on his horn. Mr. Cherry related in his visit with me that he worked for Loy Fry making those famous hamburgers that our “old-timers” have long raved about, and that the special recipe for the meat was 1 pound of hamburger to 1 loaf of white bread. He remembered several of his classmates, but Cherry alone stands as the only living link to Hamlin’s loved school song. Even though the discovery that our words were not exactly written from the heart, but by strong encouragement by an interested and involved mother to her young teen to participate in a school contest, I think we will all agree that the words to the *Pied Piper Song* still touch the hearts of all Pipers who have ever worn the green and the white.



Donald Cherry  
Lyrics to Piper Song



Maxine Brundage  
Co-writer Musical Score



Geneva Jo Mayberry  
Co-writer Musical Score